



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Dust, earth, and ashes as symbols of mourning among the ancient Hebrews.—By Professor MORRIS JASTROW, JR., University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.

I.

AMONG the ceremonies observed by the ancient Hebrews in mourning and also as signs of distress or deep grief, the placing of earth (**אָדָמָה**) or dust (**עָפָר**) on the head, and different uses of ashes (**אָפָר**), are peculiarly interesting. The references to these customs in the Old Testament are the following :

1. **אָדָמָה**, *earth*.—1 Sam. iv. 12. The messenger who brings to Eli, at Shiloh, the tidings of the defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines approaches with his clothes (**מִקְרָי**) rent and earth on his head.—2 Sam. i. 2. Similarly, the messenger who brings David, at Ziklag, the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan comes with torn garments and with earth on his head.—2 Sam. xv. 32. During the rebellion of Absalom, Hushai the Archite, as a mark of sympathy with David's distress, comes to the king with torn tunic and with earth on his head.—Neh. ix. 1. The people, as a sign of repentance for their neglect of the Law, are gathered together, with fasting and with sackcloth, and earth upon them.¹

2. **עָפָר**, *dust*.—Jos. vii. 6. At the time of the defeat of Joshua's men by the people of Ai, Joshua tears his garments, and both he² and the elders of Israel put (literally lift up, **וַיַּעֲלִו**) dust upon their heads.—Job ii. 12. Job's three friends upon approaching him and seeing his sad condition, weep, tear their mantles, “and sprinkle the dust upon their heads towards heaven.”³—Ezek. xxvii. 30. The prophet in describing the grief at the destruction of Tyre, says that the people will weep bitterly, put (**וַיַּעֲלִו**) dust on their heads and roll themselves in ashes (**אָפָר**).—Lam. ii. 10. In the mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem, the elders of

¹ **בְּצָוֹם וּבְשִׁקְרָם וְאָדָמָה עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ**.

² The text is slightly ambiguous.

³ The meaning of this phrase is explained below, p. 146.

fair Zion are portrayed as putting (הַלְלָה) dust upon their heads and girding themselves with sackcloth.

In the apocryphal literature, also, there are two references to this custom, both in the Second Book of Maccabees.—2 Macc. x. 25. The followers of Judas Maccabeus, upon hearing of the approach of Timotheos with a great host, seek refuge in prayer, and as a sign of grief scatter earth on their heads,¹ and gird their loins with sackcloth.—2 Macc. xiv. 15. On a later occasion, when the report comes that Nicanor is advancing with a large army, the Jews “bestrewing themselves with earth² engage in prayer.”

3. **אַפְּרִים**, *ashes*.—The only passage in the Old Testament in which there is a direct reference to the custom of placing ashes on the head is 2 Sam. xiii. 19, where Tamar, after having been outraged and then dismissed by Amnon, is portrayed as “taking ashes on her head,” and going about with a torn tunic (כְּתַנְתִּים) and with her hand on her head. Elsewhere the references are to covering oneself with ashes, sitting in ashes, or wallowing in ashes. According to Isaiah lviii. 5 it appears to have been customary on the occasion of a fast to spread ashes over one’s body, **שָׂק וְאַפְּרִים**, “sackcloth and ashes being spread.” When, therefore, we are told in Dan. ix. 3 that Daniel, upon reading in the prophecies of Jeremiah that for seventy years Jerusalem should lie in ruins, was so overcome with a sense of his people’s guilt that he sought the Lord “with fasting and sackcloth and ashes,”³ it seems likely that the custom of putting ashes on the body in general is referred to. Somewhat more definite is the passage Esth. iv. 1, where Mordechai, to indicate his distress at hearing of Haman’s plot to kill the Jews, “puts on sackcloth and ashes,” and goes about the city crying bitterly. Comparison with verse 3, where it is related that the Jews in the provinces of the Persian empire engaged in “fasting, weeping, and lamentation,⁴ sackcloth and ashes being spread for many,” shows that the ‘spreading’ is synonymous with putting ashes over one’s body. Covering with ashes is also referred to in

¹ γῆ τάς κεφαλὰς καταπάσαντες.

² καταπασάμενοι γῆν. Frey, *Die altisraelitische Totentrauer*, p. 5 (Inaugural Dissertation, 1898), erroneously says “Asche.”

³ See also Matt. xi. 21 and Luke x. 13.

⁴ The word used (**מִסְפָּר**) is one of the regular terms for the lament over the dead.

the metaphor **הכְפִישָׁנִ בְאָפָר**, Lam. iii. 16, in the sense of humiliating oneself.

Sitting in ashes is twice spoken of : Job ii. 8. Job, after the many misfortunes that have come upon him, “seats himself in the midst of ashes.”—Jon. iii. 6. While the people of Nineveh, upon hearing Jonah’s gloomy prophecy, fast and put on sackcloth, the king in addition “sits in ashes.” See also Job xlvi. 6. There are likewise two references to rolling oneself in ashes—merely another way of covering oneself with them. In Jer. vi. 26 the prophet, describing the approach of the terrible northern conqueror, calls upon his people, “Gird thyself with sackcloth and roll thyself in ashes.”¹ The second is Ezek. xxvii. 30, cited above (p. 133) in connection with putting dust on the head.

The explanation of these customs usually offered, namely, that the earth, dust, or ashes is an appropriate symbol of the humility and depression that accompany grief and distress, begs the question, and is unsatisfactory in other respects. Scholars are agreed that in the case of ancient customs there is always a *specific*, and not merely a *general*, reason why certain rites are observed in certain cases. Robertson Smith, accordingly, has thrown out the fertile suggestion that the dust used was taken from the grave and the ashes from sacrifices performed at the grave.² Schwally, while not altogether satisfied with this view, is inclined to adopt it in default of a better explanation ; but also adds a suggestion of his own that the rites in question may have some connection with the institutions of slavery.³ Benzinger, in his *Hebräische Archäologie*, is silent on this point. Nowack quotes Robertson Smith, without committing himself;⁴ while the latest writer on the subject, Johannes Frey, expresses his dissent from Schwally’s surmise that the rites have something to do with the institutions of slavery,⁵ but, again falling back on the general notion of humility expressed in the customs, adds nothing of any moment to the solution of the problem. Robertson Smith’s hypothesis remains, then, the only one to be considered. Its value will be shown in the course of this paper.

¹ Not ‘sprinkle on the head,’ as Schwally, *Das Leben nach dem Tode*, 14, erroneously interprets.

² *Religion of the Semites*, 413 f. [omitted in 2nd ed.].

³ *Das Leben nach dem Tode*, 15.

⁴ *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Archäologie*, i. 194.

⁵ *Die altisraelitische Totentrauer*, 16–19.

II.

The question which suggests itself at the outset of our investigation is, Does the use of earth, dust, and ashes, signify the same thing? An examination of the passages cited above enables us to answer the question in the negative. Earth and dust may indeed be regarded as practically synonymous. Hence on the occasion of a defeat either earth (1 Sam. iv. 12) or dust (Jos. vii. 6) is employed, but not ashes. Again, while in the instances where earth or dust is mentioned there is a direct indication that the one or the other is placed on the head, there is only one passage (2 Sam. xiii. 19) where "ashes on the head" are spoken of. The expression, "And Tamar took ashes on her head,"¹ is awkward and ambiguous to say the least; we should expect וַתִּשְׁמַע or וַתַּעַל. The fact that the Greek translators² found it necessary to make an addition, rendering, "And Tamar took ashes and put them on her head," only increases the suspicion that the original text has in some way been interfered with. Further on in the same verse we are told, וַתִּשְׁמַע יְדָה עַל רָאשָׁה. It is unlikely that Tamar first placed ashes on her head and then put her hand on her head,³ or rather on the ashes. Now the verb לְקַח means not only to 'take,' but also to 'take away, remove.'⁴ If, now, by a slight change we read פָּאַר instead of אַפְּר, we shall obtain a much more satisfactory sense: "And Tamar took off the tiara on her head, and the richly colored garment she had on she tore; and she put (or threw) her hand on her head and went about weeping bitterly." The פָּאַר, as is well known, is distinctively an article of feminine luxury,⁵ worn on the head, which in days of mourning and distress is taken off (Ezek. xxiv. 17, 23). A perfect parallel to the phrase פָּאַר עַל רָאשָׁה in the sense of "the tiara which was on her head," is furnished by Ezek. xxiv. 23, פָּאַר כְּבָשָׂר עַל רָאשָׁיכֶם. The play upon פָּאַר and אַפְּר in Is. lxi. 3, לְתַת לְהַם פָּאַר מִבְּתַת אַפְּר, shows how easily the transposition might take place. If, however, this proposed emen-

¹ וַתִּקְחַת תְּמֵר אַפְּר עַל רָאשָׁה.

² Followed by the Syriac and Arabic versions.

³ The putting of the hand on the head occurs on Egyptian monuments as a sign of grief.

⁴ As in the famous passage Job i. 21.

⁵ Though worn by men also, Is. lxi. 10.

dation appear improbable in view of the Septuagint,¹ which presupposes אַפֶּר, there can certainly be no objection to reading אַפֶּר, a word which occurs in 1 Kgs. xx. 38, 41, where it is some part of the head-dress, a sort of turban worn around the head which could be stretched down over the eyes.² There is no doubt some etymological connection between אַפֶּר and אַפָּר.³ From an interesting passage in the Midrashic commentary on Numbers known as *Sifre*,⁴ it appears that some of the ancient scholars were inclined to interpret the passage in the way proposed. One of the rabbis remarks that “the daughters of Israel were in the habit of covering their heads; and although there is no positive proof for this assertion to be brought from the Bible, a support (יָזַר לְדָבָר) for it may be recognized in the words, וַתַּקְרַב תָּמָר אַפָּר עַל־רָאשָׁה.” This rabbi evidently took אַפָּר in the sense of a head-covering, as otherwise his remark would have no force.⁵

Whether we accept the emendation אַפָּר—which on the whole is preferable—or merely change the vowels to אַפֶּר, in either case some article of dress is referred to, not ashes. The reading was certainly in the text before the Greek translation was made; and the translators finding it impossible to make any sense of the words as they stood, inserted the words καὶ ἐπέθηκεν σποδόν between

¹ But for LXX. we might be inclined to read מַעַל רָאשָׁה for עַל, though this is not necessary if we take פָּאָר עַל רָאשָׁה as a single phrase, “her head-dress.”

² In the Assyrian *aparu* (VR. 28, 9 g) we have the exact equivalent of the Hebrew אַפָּר. The verb *apáru* is used in the sense ‘put something on the head, wear a head-gear,’ e. g., a crown or a helmet. See Delitzsch, *Assyr. Handw.*, 115.

³ Cf. שְׁלָמָה and בְּשָׁב and שְׁלָמָה ; בְּשָׁב, etc., etc.

⁴ The passage, to which my father, Rev. Dr. M. Jastrow, kindly directed my attention, occurs in connection with Num. v. 18.

⁵ See the recent discussion on the meaning of this phrase by B. Jacob, *Zeitschrift für alttest. Wissenschaft*, xvii. 72 f., xviii. 300–304, and W. Bacher, *ib.* xviii. 88–98.

⁶ It is probable that this Rabbi also took וַתַּקְרַב in the sense of ‘putting on’; but to suppose that Tamar put on a head-gear as a sign of grief is contrary to Hebrew and Semitic customs. It was precisely such articles of attire that were removed on these occasions. Moreover, as emphasized above, וַתַּקְרַב cannot mean ‘put on.’

אַפְרָה and רָאשָׁה עַל. It is interesting to note that the same confusion between אַפְרָה and אַפְרָה occurs in the Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic versions of 1 Kgs. xx. 38, 41 [also Aquila and Symmachus], where the Septuagint correctly renders אַפְרָה by τελαμών, a long bandage, or broad band.

The explanation here offered throws an unexpected light upon a passage in the Book of Judith which has hitherto been cited as a second instance in Biblical literature of the custom of placing ashes on the head as a symbol of mourning; I refer to Judith ix. 1. The situation is this: Judith, after the death of her husband, Manasses, passed three years and four months in mourning for him (viii. 4). Instead of living within the house, she set up a tent on the roof, girded herself with sackcloth, and wore the widow's garb (5 f.). Full of grief and indignation at the cruel treatment to which her people, the Jews, were subjected at the hands of Holophernes, she formed the design of killing the tyrant. She accordingly sends for the elders of Jerusalem and announces her intention of doing a deed which will go down to the remotest generations (32). After giving some directions to the elders she dismisses them, and they withdraw from her tent (36). From the fact that the interview takes place in the tent on the roof, we must infer that Judith still wore the garb of mourning. The Greek text of chap. ix. begins as follows:¹ Ἰουδαὶθ δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον, καὶ ἐπέθετο² σποδὸν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς, καὶ ἔγυμνωσεν ὃν ἐδεδύκει³ σάκκον, "Judith fell on her face, and placed ashes on her head, and stripped herself of the sackcloth in which she was clothed."

The contradiction between the two acts is most puzzling.⁴ The placing of ashes on the head is intelligible only as a sign of mourning or grief, whereas the taking off of the sackcloth signifies exactly the opposite. It is evident that there is something wrong in the Greek text; and since scholars are generally agreed that the Greek Judith is a translation of a Hebrew original,⁵

¹ Codex B (Swete).

² Var. ἐθετο.

³ Var. ἐνδεδύκει (B, cf. x. 3) and ἐνεδιδύσκετο (A).

⁴ The contradiction has been noticed by scholars, but the explanations offered have been forced and unnatural; see below.

⁵ See the summary of modern views in Strack's *Einleitung in das A.T.*, 152. Jerome knew that the Greek was a translation, but his view that the original was written in Aramaic is now generally discarded.

we are justified in suspecting an error on the part of the translator. Fritzsche and others have pointed out various mistakes in the Greek text which must have arisen from a misunderstanding or misreading of the original language,¹ and I believe that we have here another instance. The translator, like his predecessor in 2 Sam. xiii. 19, mistook נְאָפָר for אָפָר ‘ashes.’ The correct translation therefore is, “Judith . . . put on her head-dress and laid aside the sackcloth in which she was clothed.”² She feels that the time has come for her to lay aside her weeds; she is about to proceed to the camp of Holofernes, and in order to carry out her purpose must appear joyous. In confirmation of this view, we find in chap. x., where the thread of the narrative is again taken up after the prayer of Judith which fills the whole of chap. ix., the more explicit statement made (x. 2 f.), “She arose, and called her maid, and descended into the house where [hitherto]³ she abode [only] on the Sabbaths and festivals, and removed⁴ the sackcloth in which she was clothed, and took off the garments of widowhood, and bathed her body in water, and anointed herself with fine myrrh, and arranged the hair of her head and put on the headdress,⁵ and put on the festive garments

¹ Collected by Ball in his industrious Commentary in Wace’s *Apocrypha* (Speaker’s Bible).

² The view advocated by Ball (*l. c. i.* 319), that ἐγίμνωσε corresponds to a Hebrew נְאָפָר, and is to be rendered, “uncovered the sackcloth,” thus making her mourning garb visible by putting off or rending what she wore above it, is untenable, and shows to what awkward straits commentators are reduced to remove the contradiction between putting on ashes and taking off sackcloth. Ball’s reference to the Syriac only proves that the translator who made this version (from the Greek) felt the difficulty, and tried to remove it by introducing words not in the text from which he translated. The sackcloth was generally worn over the ordinary dress; but even assuming, as viii. 5 might seem to imply, that Judith wore it directly on her loins, what particular reason could she have, after having worn it for three years and more, to reveal it just at a time when she felt that the days of inactive mourning must give way to vigorous action? Moreover, nothing is said in ix. 1 of her tearing off her upper garments to expose the sackcloth underneath. The text implies that the sackcloth constituted the chief garment in which she was clothed. The “garments of widowhood” further mentioned in viii. 5 and x. 3 were some additional mourning apparel.

³ During her period of mourning; see viii. 6.

⁴ περιείλατο.

⁵ καὶ ἐπέθετο μίτραν ἐπ' αὐτῆς.

in which she was attired in the days when her husband Manasses was alive."

The fourth verse goes on to describe the various other articles of luxury with which she bedecked her person, things of which during her period of mourning, in accordance with the old customs,¹ she had deprived herself. The *μίτρα* spoken of in this verse is precisely the **אַפְרָה** mentioned in 1 Kgs. xx. 38, 41, or possibly the **פָנָה**,² and we may, therefore, feel quite certain that the same word **אַפְרָה**, and not **אַפְרָה**, was the word intended by the author in ix. 1. The repetition of the statement need not cause us surprise. In ix. 1 the author wishes to indicate, in a general way, that Judith resolved to put off her mourning; and contents himself with saying that she once more put on the headdress which it was the custom of women in ordinary conditions of life to wear, and that she took off the sackcloth which was the most distinctive badge of mourning. Judith then engages in prayer; and after she is through removes all traces of mourning. In the course of his detailed description of the way in which she accomplishes this, the author repeats the reference to the headdress and the sackcloth. Judith's action is accordingly just the opposite of Tamar's. The latter, as a token of grief, begins by removing the **פָנָה** and rending her garments; Judith, to show that her mourning is over, puts on the **אַפְרָה** and takes off the sackcloth. The two passages thus placed side by side are confirmatory of each other and of the opinion here maintained, that there is no reference in either to a custom of putting ashes on the head as a sign of mourning; and inasmuch as in the other passages where ashes are mentioned in connection with grief or distress, only sitting in ashes, or covering oneself with ashes, or rolling about in ashes, is spoken of, not putting them on the head, we are justified in removing the use of ashes from the same class with the use of earth or dust, at least until positive evidence is adduced that the ancient Hebrews were accustomed to strew ashes also on the head as a symbol of mourning.

On the other hand, it is evident that there is not much difference whether earth or dust is put on the head. Dust, as used in

¹ See Frey, *Altisraelitische Totentrauer*, 15.

² The Septuagint renders **פָנָה** by *μίτρα* in Is. lxi. 10, and the Vulgate uses the same word Ex. xxxix. 26.

the Old Testament, is always earth. It is sufficient for our purpose to point to Gen. iii. 19, where in the same verse אָדָם ^{אָדָם} and עַפְרֵת ^{עַפְרֵת} are used quite interchangeably. It is also clear that the placing of earth or dust on the head is originally a mourning rite, and that, from being a token of grief for a departed relative or friend, it was extended until it became a sign of distress in general. Of the four instances above quoted in which אָדָם is used, three occur in connection with the death of some person or persons ; and similarly in all the four passages in which עַפְרֵת is employed the context indicates that deaths have taken place (so in Jos. vii. 6, Job ii. 12), or the writer employs language or metaphors drawn from the mourning for the dead (so in Lam. ii. 10, Ezek. xxvii. 30). Natural as the custom of putting earth or dust on the head as a sign of mourning may appear to us, we cannot be content in explaining ancient customs with merely natural appearances.

III.

Taking up now Robertson Smith's suggestion that "the dust strewn on the head is primarily the dust from the grave,"¹ it may be said at once that it is plausible ; yet the question still remains, why should the dust have been placed on the head ? I venture to suggest that the custom is the survival of an act which originally formed part of the burial rites.

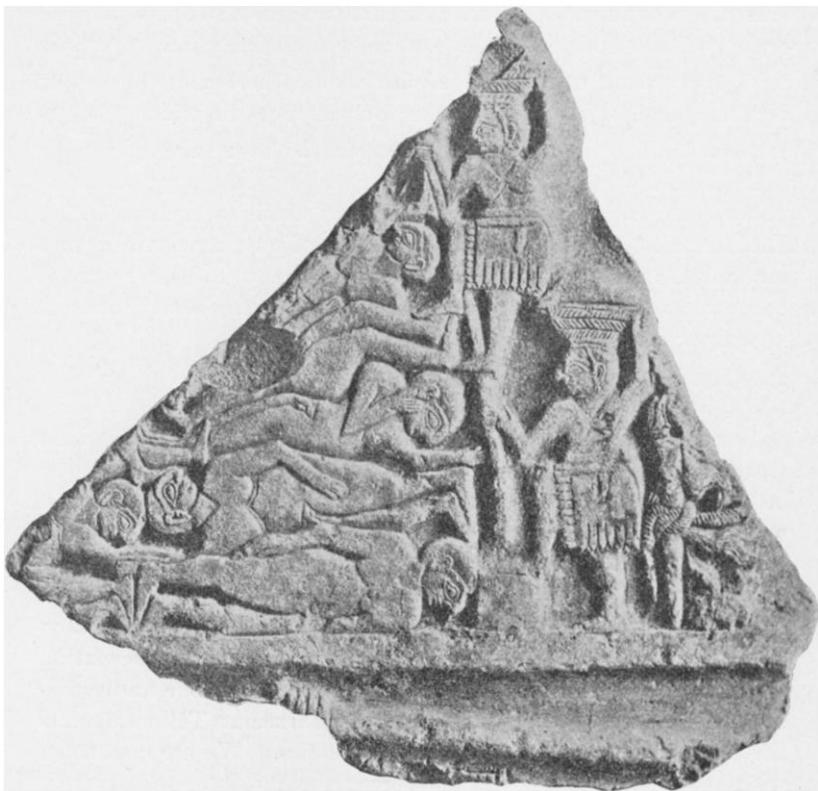
On one of the oldest monuments found beneath the soil of Babylonia, the so-called Stele of Vultures,² there is a representation which furnishes, as I believe, the clue to the custom under discussion. The monument, found by De Sarzec at Telloh, depicts the triumph of Eanna-tuma over his enemies. We are concerned with only one of the various compartments into which it is divided.³ This represents the burial of the fallen soldiers of the victorious army. While the corpses of the enemy are left exposed to the air and light—the greatest misfortune that could happen to a dead person—and are, in consequence, being torn to pieces by vultures, the bodies of Eanna-tuma's soldiers are carefully arranged in symmetrical rows one above the other. At one side are seen attendants, stripped to the waist, with baskets

¹ *Religion of the Semites* (1st ed.), p. 414.

² De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, pl. 3.

³ See next page.

on their heads, climbing up a mound which adjoins the place where the rows of corpses are. That these attendants are engaged in burying the dead soldiers is evident; and there is no reason to doubt that they are building the mound upon which they are climbing, as the burial place.



The great age of this remarkable monument justifies the conclusion that earth-burial was practised in ancient Babylonia. In the later modes of burial, in which the dead were placed on the ground and covered with an oblong clay dish,¹ we have in the shape of this dish the trace of the mound which it was once customary to build over and around the dead person; and the tenacity of custom is to be recognized in the present day fashion of raising a small mound where the dead are buried, although the bodies are sunk deep into the ground.

¹ See Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, 597.

The attendants being engaged in building the mound, it is most natural to suppose that in the baskets which they have on their heads they are carrying the earth used in making the mound. It is on the head that in the ancient Orient, as in the East of to-day, burdens are usually borne. In the inscriptions of Assyrian and Babylonian rulers there occur frequent references to this workman's basket, the *dupšikku* as it was called.¹ Several kings pride themselves upon having taken the basket on their head, and upon having pressed their sons into service to assist in the sacred task of building a temple to a god.

Heuzey, in his remarks on the monument found by De Sarzec, at first explained the scene as has been done above; but afterwards changed his mind so far as the contents of the baskets were concerned. Instead of supposing that these baskets contained earth to be used in raising the mound, he expressed the opinion that the baskets contained the provisions for a sacrifice to the dead. He was led to this view through the frequent representation in statuettes and votive offerings of a person with a basket poised on his or her head.² It is true that when the offerings consisted of cereals or fruits, it was carried in a basket placed on the head of the person who was about to enter the sanctuary, or the presence of a deity,³ and there is reason to believe that among the Hebrews likewise, when the firstfruits were brought to the temple by the offerer in a basket,⁴ the basket was carried on the head; but it does not follow that the basket on the head in every case indicates the bringing of a sacrifice. Why should the attendants be represented in the act of climbing up the mound, unless they were engaged in building the latter. The sacrifice to the dead is brought at the grave; but in the compartment in question the dead are still exposed to view, and hence are not yet buried. Moreover, beside the attendants with baskets, others are seen arranging the dead neatly in rows. From this it is clear that burial is taking place, but that it is not yet completed. Perrot and Chipiez in their discussion of the monu-

¹ See Delitzsch, *Assyr. Handw.*, 227, and Muss-Arnolt, *Assyrian Dictionary*, 264, for the passages in question.

² See, e. g., the illustration in Lehmann's *Šamašsumukin*, frontispiece, and De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, pl. 28.

³ See De Sarzec, *Découvertes*, pl. 2 bis, where Ur-Nina appears stripped to the waist and with a basket on his head.

⁴ Deut. xxvi. 2, 4.

ment¹ also reach the conclusion that the scene represented is a rite of burial, and call attention to the fact that the action of the figures with the baskets "indicates that the weight they are carrying is greater than a basket full of cakes, fruits, and other things of that kind would account for."

Everything, therefore, points to the correctness of Heuzey's first surmise, that the baskets contain earth to be used in burial. Another circumstance which adds to the probability of this view is the fact that the attendants are stripped to the waist. In the monuments of ancient Babylonia, persons engaged in a religious act sometimes appear naked, or stripped to the waist,² just as the preislamic Arabs when they came to their sanctuaries stripped themselves;³ but this was only done, so far as the monuments show, when the worshipper entered the presence of a deity, not when merely bringing a sacrifice. The removal of a man's ordinary clothes, however, is a feature of the ancient mourning rites in the Orient; for, as will be shown in a special article on the subject, the rending of the mourning garments so frequently spoken of in the Old Testament was originally a tearing off of the garments, while putting on the **נִשְׁמַת** (sackcloth) is the girding oneself with a piece of stuff which represents a return to simpler fashions of early days. To this day in the Orient it is the mourners themselves who dispose of the dead. In the Old Testament, it is always assumed that the father is buried by his sons.⁴ The mourning proper, therefore, began with the act of burying the dead. It was at this time that the mourner tore off his garments and girded about his loins a simple cloth which hung down so as to cover his nakedness. This is precisely the kind of garb which the attendants pictured on the Stele of Vultures have on. They are dressed as mourners would be when about to dispose of their dead. It has been conjectured that these attendants are priests. There is no special reason for this opinion, but whether priests or laymen, their peculiar garb is not to be thus accounted for. Their dress is not that of ordinary workmen, for these appear on the monuments with an upper garment, though without sleeves.⁵

¹ *History of Art in Chaldaea and Assyria*, ii. 178.

² Peters, *Nippur*, ii. 380 (Plate II. no. 11); other examples in De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, pl. 2 bis. See Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, 666.

³ Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentumes* (1st ed.), 106.

⁴ See, e. g., Gen. xxv. 9, xxxv. 29.

⁵ Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1883), pp. 113 and 134.

Accepting the interpretation proposed, the scene on the Stele of Vultures, as will now be apparent, helps us to understand the juxtaposition of rending the garments and putting dust on the head which occurs in the Biblical passages quoted at the beginning of this article. Hushai the Archite, the messenger who brings Eli tidings of the death of his sons, the one who brings David the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan, and, similarly, Joshua and the elders of Israel as a sign of grief, and lastly the friends of Job to express their sympathy with the hero, so sorely tried by death in his household and other misfortunes, all appear with torn garments, and earth or dust on their heads. The conventional rending of the garments succeeds an earlier custom of tearing or stripping off the ordinary clothes and girding on a cloth hanging down from the loins. So frequent is the conjunction of the tearing of the garments and the putting on of sackcloth that there can be no doubt of a direct connection between the two acts. The one was preliminary to the other;¹ and hence the single phrase, either the tearing of the clothes or the putting on of sackcloth, could be used to imply both acts. But just as this act of tearing off the garments in order to put on the sackcloth develops into the conventional custom of merely making an incision into the seam of one's coat, as still practiced by orthodox Jews,² so the practice of putting earth in a basket to be used in the act of burial becomes a conventional symbol of mourning. Instead of carrying earth on the head and in a basket, the earth is shovelled into the grave and heaped up into a mound. The basket no longer serves any practical purpose and is discarded; but as a trace of the ancient manner of performing the act of burial earth is placed on the head, and the mourner goes about in a garb which was originally the one he put on when about to bury the dead with his own hands.

It is of interest to note in this connection the traces of similar customs among the ancient Egyptians. In the days of Herodotus,³ male and female mourners still went about bare to the waist. Representations on Egyptian monuments confirm this statement of Herodotus,⁴ as well as his observation that the mourners smeared their heads with earth or mud. This custom furnishes a

¹ This is also the opinion of Frey, *Altisraelitische Totentrauer*, 6.

² The modern Persians continue to tear their garments down to the waist. ³ Hdt. ii. 85. ⁴ Rawlinson's notes on Hdt. l. c.

parallel to the Biblical passages in which the placing of dust or earth on the head is referred to ; and it is fair to presume that among the Hebrews the custom was modified so that the earth or mud was no longer taken directly from the grave. That earth burial was practiced in early times by the Egyptians is certain. The change to the later custom of placing the embalmed bodies in sepulchral chambers would naturally lead to profound modifications of burial customs ; and as a matter of fact, the mere placing of the hand upon the head became a symbol of grief.¹ If Herodotus is right in saying that “sometimes even the faces” were besmeared with mud, it would only show how entirely the original purport of the custom was lost sight of in the course of the changes which the mode of disposing of the dead underwent among the Egyptians. In direct continuation of the ancient practices the women among the peasantry of Upper Egypt at the present time “daub their faces and bosoms and part of their dress with mud ; and tie a rope-girdle generally made of the coarse grass called *khalfa* round the waist.”² Among the Greeks the custom of bedaubing the face with mud is met with, but not in connection with funeral or mourning rites.³

The explanation here offered of the custom of placing earth or dust on the head enables us to understand the hitherto obscure expression at the end of Job ii. 12 “sprinkling the dust . . . towards heaven.” If we start from the assumption that the earth was originally placed in baskets on the head, the natural destination for the earth would be to be thrown over the dead body or into the grave. Instead, therefore, of supposing that the earth which is placed on the head is taken *from* the grave, as Robertson Smith suggests, it is *for* the grave that the earth is intended. With a change in the manner of burial and the consequent discarding of the basket, there would naturally remain as a symbol of mourning the placing of earth on the head ; and then, since this would be done after the actual burial was over, the earth would be thrown off from the head, no longer towards the ground but into the air. That is what the friends of Job actually did. “They scattered the dust on their heads towards heaven” (ii. 12), i. e. threw it off their heads into the air.

¹ See the illustration in Rawlinson’s Herodotus, i. p. 124.

² Lane, *Modern Egyptians* (London, 1837), ii. 369.

³ See Pausanias, vii. 22, 9, and Frazer’s note in his edition of Pausanias, vol. iv. p. 101.

It has already been pointed out that the placing of dust on the head as a concomitant act to tearing or tearing off the garments was extended in usage from an actual mourning rite to a symbol expressive of grief in general, or even of sympathy with one in distress. In the New Testament we find a further extension of the same custom to express a form of grief in which indignation is largely commingled. Passing by Rev. xviii. 19, where the people are represented as casting dust on their heads upon witnessing the destruction of Babylon, there are three passages in which the tearing of the clothes is a symbol of indignation, viz. Mark xiv. 63 with the parallel Matt. xxvi. 65, and Acts xiv. 14. The high priest, upon hearing Jesus proclaim himself by implication to be the Son of God, "rent his garments, saying, he hath spoken blasphemy." When Paul and Barnabas heard the Lycaonians call them Mercury and Jupiter, they rent their garments in indignation and horror. Here the passage from grief to indignation is easy. Still more significant is Acts xxii. 23, where the Jews, listening to Paul's defence, are unable to restrain their indignation, and when he declares his mission to the Gentiles, cry out, and throw off their garments, and cast dust into the air. We have here the same combination of the tearing, or tearing off, of garments and the throwing of dust into the air which we found in Job ii. 12. There is no possible doubt that the same custom is referred to in the two passages. In the one case, the gesture derived from the burial rites is used as a token of sympathy with Job in his misfortune; in the other, its significance is extended so that it becomes a sign of utter repudiation—Paul is treated as one dead to his people. At the same time it is worth while to note that in the New Testament passage the dust is not put on the head before being thrown into the air or towards heaven. As the custom became further removed from its original import it underwent slight modifications. There being no special reason for placing the dust on the head, this feature was dropped.

The development of the custom may, therefore, be summed up as follows :

1. At the time when the act of burial was performed by the immediate relatives, it was customary for the latter to strip themselves to the waist, place a basket containing earth on their heads, and pour this earth over the corpse or into the grave where the body lay, in this way raising a mound which marked the place of burial.

2. The garb worn at the funeral became the mourning dress. The use of the basket was discarded, but the placing of earth on the head became a symbol of mourning.

3. Long after the mode of burial underwent a change, the custom of tearing off the clothes and putting on sackcloth continued, and what was originally a practical feature of the interment was maintained as a ceremony of mourning. We have unfortunately no means of ascertaining for how long a period the mourning garb was worn by the ancient Hebrews. The indications are that this period was originally seven days,¹ which remains to this day the duration of *strict* mourning among the Jews; but the tendency soon developed to extend the term. It is hard to suppose that the dust was kept on the head for any length of time. From the passage in Job we may infer that after being placed there it was immediately thrown off into the air. At all events, the act of placing the dust on the head became a mere conventional symbol and in the course of time fell into disuse, the mourners contenting themselves with simply taking up some earth and throwing it into the air. In the days of Paul this had become the general custom. There appears to be a close connection between this custom and the custom, still observed in various parts of the world to-day, of taking up some handfuls of earth at the open grave and throwing them upon the corpse or the coffin in which the body rests.

4. The tearing off of the clothes was originally the preliminary act to putting on the simpler garment hanging down from the loins. Instead of a hasty and violent removal of the clothing, the tearing became conventionalized until it was accomplished merely by ripping open a portion of the upper garment. A simple loin-cloth took the place of a more elaborate piece of clothing which was worn under the ordinary dress. In time this custom died out, and the conventional rent in the coat alone remained. There appears again to be a direct connection between the loin-cloth and the mourning-band worn around the hat or sleeve by mourners in Occidental countries; while the mourning dress worn by women at the present day bears witness to female conservatism in religious fashions which stands in notable contrast to the frequent changes in their secular attire.

5. The conventionalized tearing of the garments and the placing of dust on the head were extended in their use, and served as

¹ So in Job ii. 13.

indications of sympathy with one in mourning, as symbols in making announcement of a death, and then as quite general signs of grief and distress. Removed in this way from their original import, the same gestures were also employed to give expression to a feeling of grief in which indignation was a prominent factor; either an indignation produced through holy horror or an indignation springing from a feeling of repugnance.

V.

Coming back, in conclusion, to the use of ashes in days of mourning, it is possible, as Robertson Smith suggests, that the ashes which the mourner rubbed over his person, or in which he rolled himself, or sat, were originally taken from the remains of the sacrifice offered at the grave. Among the Semites such sacrifices were as common as among the Greeks and other peoples of antiquity. At all events, if the inferences drawn above be sound, the totally different significance of the use of ashes from that of the use of dust or earth follows as a matter of course. Setting aside the single Biblical reference (2 Sam. xiii. 19) and the passage in Judith (ix. 1) as irrelevant, a reference to the placing of ashes on the head in Talmudical literature confirms this conclusion. In Mishna Taanith ii. 1, we are told that a feature of the religious fasts was the purification of the chest containing the tablets of the law. In connection with this purification the chief officials put ashes on their head. Although the assertion is made elsewhere in the Talmud that אפר is sometimes used for עפר,¹ the addition in Taanith of אפר מקללה, expressly explained by Bertinoro as 'burnt ashes,' makes it certain that ashes are here meant and not dust. Burnt ashes, moreover, suggests that a sacrifice of some kind was once connected with the purification, and that the placing of ashes on the heads of the officials had an expiatory significance. To suppose that the use of ashes as a sign of mourning points to the custom of cremating the dead is impossible; for we know that, so far as the ancient Semites were concerned, the destruction of the body by fire was a punishment, and generally looked upon as a misfortune. Nor is it at all improbable that the placing of ashes on the head, when this was done, is an imitation of the other and very old custom of putting dust or earth on the head. At all events, from the practice of rubbing

¹ *Hullin* 85^b; see also *Taanith* 16^a.

one's face or body with the ashes of a sacrifice—either an offering at the grave or an expiatory offering—we can understand how the custom arose of covering the body with ashes, or sitting in ashes, or of wallowing in them.

If we turn to other nations, we shall find that there also ashes in mourning customs have a totally different meaning from dust or earth. In the *Iliad* there is an interesting description of Achilles, on hearing of Patroclus's death, pouring hot ashes on his head.¹ This act, it must be noted, took place at the tent of Achilles, and not in any connection with the burial. The ashes, therefore, could not have been taken from any cremation ceremony; Leaf, in his commentary, suggests that the ashes were taken from an altar to *Zēs Ἐρκεῖος* which stood in front of the tent.² The more common custom among the Greeks was to grasp clods of earth and put them on the head and over the face. My colleague Professor Lamberton, who kindly directed my attention to the passage in Homer, is of the opinion that the use of ashes as a sign of mourning is an early and comparatively rare custom; outside of the single reference in the *Iliad*, it is not mentioned in Greek literature.³ I call attention to this, because many writers on Hebrew antiquities refer to the supposed corresponding custom of the Greeks.

So far as I have been enabled to extend my investigations on this point into the funeral customs of other nations than Semites, Egyptians, and Greeks, I find a confirmation of the thesis here maintained, which connects dust and earth directly with rites of interment, and separates from this the use of ashes. While the employment of dust or earth in some way as a symbol of mourning is common, the use of ashes forms, to say the least, the exception. Indeed, I have been unable to find that ashes were employed by the Romans, the ancient Teutons, or the North American Indians, in either direct or indirect connection with funeral rites or mourning for the dead; but on this point, I shall be glad to be enlightened by those who have made a more special study of funeral and mourning rites.

¹ Σ 22 f. ἀμφοτέρησι δὲ χερσὶν ἐλῶν κόνιν αἰθαλόεσσαν χείνατο κὰκ κεφαλῆς. [Cf. ω 316 f.]

² *The Iliad*, vol. ii. p. 223.

³ In Herrmann's *Lehrbuch der griechischen Privatalterthümer* (3 ed.) no mention is made of the practice.